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## Damaging Goods? Francophone Children's Books in a Postcolonial World

KIERA VACLAVIK

*The recent furore over Tintin au Congo in Britain is symptomatic of Western concerns about the perpetuation of negative racial stereotypes within much classic children's literature. This article interrogates such anxiety via discussion of three texts (by Hergé, Michel Tournier and Maryse Condé) produced for a European readership but set and – crucially – read in other parts of the world. Each text demonstrates the difficulty of predicting responses which frequently confound expectations and vary widely according to the situation of the reader. An ostensibly disparaging text can be a source of pride and hilarity, whilst a work produced to fight the cause of an oppressed community can distress and disturb members of that very group. Critical attendance to the reception of canonical texts within colonial and postcolonial settings will, it is argued, provide the most satisfactory response to the calls for censorship which utterly neglect alternative, resistant readings and non-European readers.*

**Key words:** Reception studies, racism, censorship, Hergé, Michel Tournier, Maryse Condé.

### CONTROVERSY

In the summer of 2007, human rights lawyer David Enright went into one of the many Borders outlets in London with his African wife and their two sons. As he browsed, he came across *Tintin in the Congo*, first published in 1931 but only translated into English, with an advisory foreword, in 2005. Enright's response to the book and his subsequent actions triggered a controversy which attracted considerable media attention. Repercussions have been felt in the publishing and book retail industries but Enright's encounter with the text also led indirectly to the mounting of a court case in Belgium. 'I was aghast', Enright recalled, 'to see page after page of representations of black African people as baboons or monkeys, bowing before a white teenager and speaking like retarded children' (quoted in Glendinning). Enright took his complaint to the government-funded watchdog, the Commission for Racial Equality, who issued an acerbic statement articulating the lawyer's concerns (although dropping the rather dubious references to mentally-ill minors): 'This book contains imagery and words of hideous racial prejudice, where the "savage natives" look like

monkeys and talk like imbeciles. Whichever way you look at it, the content of this book is blatantly racist' ('CRE statement').

Even the most cursory glance through *Tintin in the Congo* confirms the validity of these observations. It is an eminently 'closed' text, to adopt Umberto Eco's term, which aims to elicit a specific response on the part of the reader, namely, a relishing in the prowess and supremacy of the young hero (Eco 7–8). The Congolese characters serve throughout as foil to the masterful, skilful Tintin: portrayed almost without exception as ignorant, idle, and ineffective, they do – as Enright rightly observes – have unmistakably simian traits. Tintin and Snowy/Milou are indeed worshipped, and the speech of their worshippers is both caricatured and limited.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as Jean-Marie Apostolidès points out, they are also wholly homogenised: 'The natives are undifferentiated from each other, they have the same stereotypical features, the same character, and do not on the whole possess a name which allows them to be told apart'. (Apostolidès 22).<sup>2</sup> A recent diplomatic trading of blows demonstrates the extent to which the text is now regarded as being synonymous with racism. When a Belgian minister criticised the Democratic Republic of Congo's government in 2004, a Congolese spokesperson retaliated with the damning comment: 'It's *Tintin in the Congo* all over again' ('DR Congo slams "Tintin" minister').

So the CRE certainly has a point. But their demands on the basis of this assessment are much less straightforward. Their statement continues:

High street shops, and indeed any shops, ought to think very carefully about whether they ought to be selling and displaying it. Yes, it was written a long time ago, but this certainly does not make it acceptable. This is potentially highly offensive to a great number of people. It beggars belief that in this day and age that [sic] any shop would think it acceptable to sell and display 'Tintin In The Congo'. The only place that it might be acceptable for this to be displayed would be in a museum, with a big sign saying 'old fashioned, racist claptrap' ('CRE statement').

There have been a range of responses to this statement. My own local lending library appears to have removed the book from its shelves entirely. Both Borders and Waterstones settled for a compromise: neither withdrew the text but it was nevertheless moved away from the children's section of their stores and instead placed with the graphic novels for adults. But the Commission's comments have also had rather more unforeseen consequences: firstly, sales of *Tintin in the Congo* immediately soared, moving from place 4343 to place 5 on Amazon's best-seller list in just four days according to Wikipedia ('Tintin in the Congo'). The statement has also had an impact in the Francophone world. Bienvenu Mbutu Mondondo, a Congolese student at the Université Libre de Bruxelles [Free University of Brussels], intended to buy *Tintin au Congo* as a present for his nephew in the summer of 2007. But having read about the CRE's statement in Britain, his sister objected, leading Bienvenu himself to re-read the text which he also found to be unacceptable, 'an insult to all Congolese' (quoted in Waterfield n.p.). He then lodged a complaint against Moulinsart, the company holding the rights to Hergé's works, who were accused of 'racisme et xénophobie' (racism and

xenophobia) (Bouilhet n.p.). Mondondo also took his grievance to the Brussels-based Centre pour l'égalité des chances [Centre for Equal Opportunities]. Unlike the CRE in Britain, this organisation took the issue no further. For director Joseph de Witte: 'This is political correctness gone mad, which borders on the ridiculous. To fight against racism, we prefer to fight against discrimination in the workplace or in housing' (Bouilhet).<sup>3</sup>

De Witte's response has for the most part been replicated in Britain where the CRE's statement has been widely condemned and criticised. The most frequent objection is that such a move sets a dangerous precedent, and would lead to the suppression not only of all of Hergé's other works, but also those of a whole range of literary 'greats' from Kipling, Twain and Conrad to Shakespeare himself. And if such calls were taken to their logical conclusion there would, as journalist India Knight commented of the Enright case in *The Sunday Times*, be nothing left at all: 'you could burn every book that exists on the basis that you can guarantee someone will find it offensive' (Knight). Equally liable for censure and censorship, others point out, is a great deal of rap music produced by black artists, and a whole raft of incendiary material stereotyping not blacks but whites.<sup>4</sup>

Such objections to the Commission's statement clearly stand up. But they are all negative and defensive and provide a rather insufficient response to the very real concerns of Enright, Montondo and others (including some of my own students who called for the text to be removed from the syllabus of the course I teach on Francophone children's literature). The CRE's demands can and should be countered in a more positive way. Few of the responses to the CRE statement contend or even engage with the basic idea that books have the potential to influence and injure young people in particular. Nor do most people seem to find the decision to move the albums from the children's section to the adult shelves particularly problematic or even worthy of comment. This basic idea – that book reading can be damaging for children – will be examined in the next part of this article. Grounds for the more positive response to the CRE will then be outlined, before considering two further texts which, like *Tintin au Congo*, were initially produced for a metropolitan audience. But like Hergé's controversial text, they too were not only set but also read in other parts of the world.

## CENTURIES OF CONCERN

Western concerns about the pernicious influence of reading on young and old alike are, of course, nothing new. As the stories of Paolo and Francesca, Don Quixote and Emma Bovary reveal, reading can trigger dissatisfaction, disillusion and delusion, with dangerous consequences for the status quo. Particularly vulnerable to the negative potential of the written word were, it was felt, children. To this day, young readers are widely perceived to be more impressionable than adults and less able to differentiate between fact and fiction. Over the past two hundred and fifty years, a vast range of commentators from across the

political spectrum have spoken out against the perils to the young inherent in the reading process (for an overview, see Mark I. West 680, 688). In the late eighteenth century Rousseau famously slammed book reading of virtually all sorts in *Emile*: 'La lecture', he declares, 'est le fléau de l'enfance' (Reading is the plague of childhood) (Rousseau 145). For Rousseau, fictionality and artifice are wholly inappropriate fare for the young. The one exception made – Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* – is treated much more as a historical document relating factual material than as a fictional creation. Focusing on La Fontaine's fables which were widely distributed to children at the time, Rousseau argues that they will either not be understood at all, or else do the child reader more harm than good (Rousseau 113). A close reading of 'The Crow and the Fox' indicates all of the linguistic, literary, metaphysical and philosophical minefields it opens up for the young reader. *Emile* and his counterparts are far better off running, playing and learning to swim, than holed up inside a nursery struggling with a book.

Rousseau affirms and reaffirms the deleterious effects of virtually all forms of reading on the young. But most expressions of concern have been about certain types of book rather than reading *per se*. The fairy tale, for example, has been a favourite target for a whole range of groups. According to Ruth Bottigheimer, Puritans deemed them corrupting, 'non-Christian in content and anti-Christian in intent' (264), while their incorporation of the fantastic also rendered them the *bête noire* of Enlightenment pedagogues and eighteenth-century rationalists. Although fairy tale and fantasy dominate children's literature and culture today, adult concerns have by no means disappeared: the moral implications of the depiction of sorcery in children's books constitute a source of considerable anxiety amongst certain commentators and observers.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, attention has nevertheless shifted from particular types of texts to particular groups of readers. From the 1970s onwards, commentators have criticised a wide range of books for their failures with regard to female and black readers in particular.<sup>6</sup> Jack Zipes, for example, refers to the classical fairy tale tradition as 'harmful', not because of its incorporation of the *merveilleux* or *fantastique*, but because he sees it as tool of control, especially with respect to the ideals of femininity it promotes (Zipes 33). Bob Dixon tackles issues of sex, class, race and politics in a two-volume work published in 1977, *Catching them Young*, which aimed to 'increase the awareness of what happens in children's fiction and to try to ensure that a lot of it doesn't happen any more' (Dixon I. xv). For Dixon, reading can be highly dangerous: 'Much of the material in children's books is anti-social, if not anti-human and is more likely to stunt and warp young people than help them grow' (Dixon I. xiv). Nor is it only the most explicit cases which cause consternation or the immediate targets who suffer:

It's at least arguable that the less apparent racism is – that is, the more it's carried in symbolic terms – the more psychologically damaging it can be. The fact that the more symbolic forms are usually intended for younger children may be an important part of the argument since such children are all the more impressionable. And when we speak of psychological destruction, it should be understood that

racism, in children's fiction as elsewhere, is harmful to all people, black or white, or whatever colour they may be, though, of course, non-white people obviously suffer from its effects more. (Dixon I. 95)

Some twenty years later Margery Hourihan would largely replicate Dixon's argument with specific reference to the adventure genre. For Hourihan, the pervasive and powerful narratives of adventure are highly damaging. Women and non-whites are marginalised while the male hero—who serves as narrator and/or focaliser—is valorised and glorified. Readers who do not themselves correspond to the white, male heroic ideal are consequently 'taught to despise themselves, to collude in the construction of their own inferiority rather than to rebel against being so labelled' (Hourihan 44).

#### TINTIN AU CONGO

If Hourihan and Dixon are right, *Tintin au Congo* (amongst many, many others) is highly dangerous to white and black children alike. Its continued existence can only be tolerated on the pragmatic grounds alluded to above: banning such a text would open up the floodgates, making it difficult to know where suppressions should stop. But from this perspective, measures designed to prevent the text falling into young, innocent hands—by moving it into adult sections of bookshops, or into a museum display—are imperative, guaranteeing protection until children reach adulthood (or until they start wandering into the adult sections of bookshops).

Yet not everyone is in agreement with this course of action and it is in this context that a more positive response to the CRE begins to emerge. Efforts of protection such as these can themselves be seen as at best blinkered and at worst dangerous. *Tintin au Congo* was always meant to be educational as well as an entertaining: it was produced when Hergé was still very much beholden to the Abbé Wallez, a strict right-wing disciplinarian who had commissioned a series of *bandes dessinées* (comic strips) which would send clear moral messages to young Belgian Catholics. The text retains its pedagogical value today, although in ways utterly inconceivable to its author and editor at the time of production. Given that the Congo was one of the most brutally repressive of all colonial regimes, the text in no way provides an accurate representation of Belgian colonisation. What it might offer, however, as Michael Farr argues, is valuable insight into the prevailing popular ideology of 1930s Belgium (Farr 22). In one episode midway through the text, for example, Tintin's car gets stuck on the train tracks it is crossing and derails an oncoming locomotive. The hero apologises and immediately sets about organising a re-railing operation, but he is obliged to badger the feckless Congolese passengers who include a work-shy good for nothing and a dandy afraid of getting his hands dirty. Perhaps once regarded as a reliable portrayal of an African community, this scene now instead serves to highlight key components of the European colonial mindset.

It is in this capacity as historical artefact that the Commission for Racial Equality makes its only grudging concession, stating that the only appropriate place for *Tintin au Congo* in the modern world is in a museum with a warning notice. But if the text can educate, can be used as a springboard for discussion, why consign it to the dusty museum shelf? Why not use the adventures of Tintin as a means of instruction in the misadventures of the colonial project? Umberto Eco outlines the way in which the ideological presuppositions of a text can be exposed so that 'even the most closed texts are surgically 'opened': fiction is transformed into document' (Eco 22). It is this kind of operation which India Knight, writing in the *Sunday Times*, has in mind. Rather than banning 'offensive' books,

you could be intelligent, examine context, and use it as a springboard to explain racism/colonialism/history/misogyny/the class system to your children. Just because something is unpalatable doesn't mean it has to be erased. Erasing it only serves to make it outré and desirable—sales have since rocketed by 3,800% on Amazon. (Knight n.p.)

For Knight, then, such texts can be valuable, but, as the conclusion to her article makes clear, the assumption that they are damaging nevertheless remains:

Nobody is denying those attitudes were grotesquely offensive, or that literature—and art in general—doesn't contain an embarrassment of material that causes any brown- or black-skinned adult to cringe; or any brown- or black-skinned child to feel miserably sad. (Knight, n.p.)

Arguably, the homogenisation here is as bad as anything in the text for which Knight is arguing: how can she be so sure of the responses of *any* non-white reader? And why the difference in effect between adult and child, with mere discomfiture on the one hand and utter misery on the other? For Eco, it is precisely the cliché-ridden closed texts like *Tintin au Congo* which 'give rise to the most unforeseeable interpretations' (Eco 8) and attendance to actual responses and reactions not only supports his position but also provides by far the most robust rebuttal of the CRE's demands. According to Harry Thompson, the text's 'biggest market of all was in the Belgian Congo and it continues to sell in great numbers in independent Zaire today' (Thompson 41). In the early 1970s, a survey conducted by the magazine *Zaire* showed that Congolese readers regarded Tintin as something of a national hero, and considered it an honour that he had visited their country (see Assouline 349). In the postcolonial world, relationships between former coloniser and colonised continue to be marked by desire and emulation.<sup>7</sup> But desire is flecked with derision. Far from taking offence, many Congolese have been amused by the text which provides distinct opportunities for mockery. As the editors of *Zaire* noted:

If some of the caricatured images of the Congolese people offered by *Tintin in the Congo* make white people smile, they make Congolese people really laugh because it offers them the opportunity to make fun of the white man 'who saw them like that'! (Assouline 349)<sup>8</sup>

Even the most explicit, obtrusive and belittling ideology can be turned around and used against its source. Similarly, in the diplomatic altercation alluded to earlier, the text is effectively recuperated as a weapon to be used against the West.

It is in Europe that most of the agonising over the damaging potential of the text takes place. In a recent piece on the BBC World Service programme, 'The World Today' (13 August 2007), two Congolese journalists questioned about their attitudes towards the text insist that it has no effect on children in the Congo itself. Yet they are still troubled by the possible effects of the text, concerned for young Europeans who would have a wholly inaccurate image of the inhabitants of, and daily life in, this African country. In other words, these men basically agree with the CRE, leaving us in an interesting situation wherein the text is harmful to those for whom it was initially destined whilst being recuperated by those, outside the initial intended readership, it disparages. But if the Congolese journalists share the CRE's concerns, neither concurs with its calls for the text's suppression. Both believe that banning the text risks wiping out the country's colonial past – and indeed present. One journalist points to the fact that the text still to some extent reflects the unequal power relations of a country which has by no means undergone a straightforward transition from colony to independent state.

Wiping out the past is also of course a very real danger in the West. Suppressing *Tintin au Congo*, or even simply hiding it away, results in a highly dubious whitewashing of the past, and encourages European colonial history to be forgotten rather than faced. The text has undeniably offended some readers, but by no means all. It has long been recognised that code switching – reading a text through an ideological screen other than that envisaged by the writer – produces very different interpretations (see, for example, Eco 22). By bearing this in mind with respect to children's literature, we avoid privileging certain readings – and readers – over others.

#### VENDREDI OU LA VIE SAUVAGE

Many other works for young readers were also first produced for metropolitan readers but subsequently attained a much broader audience. One such text, which has also generated a wide range of interpretations and again demonstrates the risks of becoming locked within a Eurocentric perspective, is Michel Tournier's *Vendredi ou la vie sauvage* [Friday and Robinson] (1971). This text is a rewriting of Tournier's very first novel *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique* [Friday; or, The Other Island] (1967) and, despite the author's frequent assertions to the contrary, is widely regarded as being for children (for further discussion, see Vaclavik 290). In both versions, Tournier seeks to effect what Gérard Genette refers to as a transvaluation of *Robinson Crusoe* (Genette 367–73). Defoe's novel might have been good enough for Emile, but for Tournier it had been rendered entirely redundant by the insights of Lévi-Strauss and structuralist anthropology

more generally. Tournier's Robinson can only oscillate between despair and frenetic activity when alone on the island. His initial relationship with Vendredi is identical to that of Defoe's text as he sets out to domesticate and civilise his companion. Yet although Vendredi does obey his master, his conversion is never more than superficial, and it is eventually Vendredi who saves Robinson, initiating him into a life of play, creativity and eternal youth. Tournier's Friday is clearly, then, a positive figure, far removed from Defoe's subservient minor character or the black and white minstrels of *Tintin au Congo*. And from the conspicuous absence of Robinson in both the original French title and many cover images of the text, it seems that it is Vendredi who is Tournier's true hero, his way of life rather than the work ethic and barbarism of the West which is celebrated. Critics such as Serge Koster and Jean Perrot have certainly read the text in this way (Koster 67; Perrot 148). However, others have argued that the text is by no means as radical as it may at first appear. For Richard Phillips and Gérard Genette, Tournier's Vendredi (who appears two-thirds of the way through the text and disappears before the end) remains an adjunct, a mere vehicle bringing about the white man's conversion (Phillips 155–6; Genette 373). As with Defoe, the text's true focal point is, these critics argue, not Vendredi but Robinson.

The interpretative complexity of what Eco would refer to as an 'open' text has by no means limited the text's readership or precluded its popularity amongst young readers. On the contrary, over seven million copies have been sold, it has been translated into some forty languages, and it is widely read in schools. Académie- and Goncourt-winner Tournier has stated that its popularity in the classroom is the source of his greatest pride, and what children themselves think of his work is clearly of great importance to him (quoted in Busnel 98). Indeed, many of the alterations made to the second version of *Vendredi* came as a direct result of working with children in schools, responding to their questions and reactions. Once the text was completed, it was also in visits to schools, in France and elsewhere, that Tournier was able to observe patterns of identification which frequently confounded his expectations. In French schools, he noted in the early 1980s how children – presumably of all ethnicities – had identified with Vendredi, the representative of artistic liberty, youth, play, and natural exuberance. While this was wholly in line with his expectations, the responses of Senegalese children took him utterly by surprise, demonstrating that unforeseeable interpretations are by no means the exclusive preserve of the closed text: 'I've just returned from a journey to Senegal where I [met schoolchildren], and to my great amazement, despite the affinity of skin colour, I saw them reject Friday and identify with Robinson' (Tournier, 'Michel Tournier et l'enfance' 4).<sup>9</sup> Identification is, clearly, much more than skin deep. As the responses of the Senegalese children to Tournier's enquiries shows, it is as much to do with aspiration and status as recognition and resemblance:

I asked them why. They gave me some reasons: because he has a beard (beards are prestigious in those countries, e.g. French missionaries), because he has a rifle, because he's a builder and farmer. Most of these children are farmers' sons.



Moreover, Robinson has a servant which is the height of prestige. Friday, on the other hand, is nothing. In a class of girls I asked: 'Who would you like to marry?' They all chose Robinson. One of them said: 'Because Friday would be unable to feed a wife and children.' (Tournier, 'Michel Tournier et l'enfance' 4)<sup>10</sup>

According to Tournier, the two patterns of identification observed in France and Senegal demonstrate that children of the Third World 'ne rêvent que de culture' (dream only of culture) whilst those in the West dream of 'la vie sauvage' (life in the wild) (Tournier, 'Michel Tournier et l'enfance' 4). Such a schema is perhaps over-simplified: the responses of female and non-white French readers at the time require further attention, and it would be interesting to know whether shifts have occurred over the past twenty-five years. Nevertheless, Tournier's observations underline again how difficult it is to predict interpretations and patterns of identification, and how wary we should be of making simplistic assumptions along colour lines without attendance to actual responses.

### RÊVES AMERS

While thus highlighting the dangers of supposition, the text itself has never been described as dangerous. Another text, which, like *Vendredi*, has also been widely read in schools, returns us to issues of offence, damage and harm. Maryse Condé's *Rêves amers* [Bitter dreams] (1987), initially entitled *Haiti chérie*, is based on the true story of a group of Haitian boat people. It recounts the journey of thirteen year-old Rose-Aimée who is sent away from her poverty-stricken rural home to work in the city. Following an urban descent into hell, she embarks for, but never arrives in, the United States. As is the case with *Vendredi*, there is some confusion as to the intended readership of the text, and Condé herself has issued somewhat contradictory statements concerning her motivation in its writing. Her earliest comments on the subject, made in 1988, suggest that this was a bridge-building exercise aimed at a non-metropolitan readership:

I wrote a book for children [...] Why so? Because in the schools of Guadeloupe and Martinique, our kids sit next to the children of Haitian immigrants without understanding them. In fact they are filled with contempt that they learned from their parents. It seemed to me that writing a book would be a way of fighting prejudice at its roots. That is why I wrote *Haiti chérie*. (Condé, 'Pan-Africanism' 57-8)

But just three years later, Condé would refer to an entirely different intended audience and a not unrelated but nevertheless quite separate motivation:

I remember questioning children before writing the story. I asked kids in my neighbourhood in Paris whether they knew anything about Haiti, and they said they didn't. So I decided to draw their attention to this country. Later, when I settled in Guadeloupe, I found that a lot of Haitian children felt marginalized in schools there. (Quoted in Pfaff 80, my emphasis.)

The 'later' is essential here. It demonstrates that it was a metropolitan readership which was initially targeted and that the Caribbean readers (referred to

exclusively in 1988) were only tacked on after the event. This would be confirmed in a statement of 2004 in which, for the first time, the impetus for the text is attributed to the children themselves:

In fact, when I wrote *Rêves amers* it was in response to the requests of a group of children. I met them regularly in Paris at a reading group that I ran. They asked me several questions about the boat people of Haiti they saw on the TV news. 'Do you think that there are children among the people on the boat?' one little girl had asked me. (Gens de la Caraïbe, 'Maryse Condé, spectatrice')<sup>11</sup>

Whatever the initial intention, the text does nevertheless respond to each of the stated aims. It militates against prejudice by demonstrating a whole range of factors and circumstances leading to migration (drought, chance, exploitation, cruelty, hope of a better life). Through the perspective and experiences of the young heroine, Condé delivers a series of manageable lessons in economics, politics and sociology. In the main body of the text and in the several accompanying footnotes, Condé also provides considerable information concerning the island: its climate, history, landscape and linguistic variety, as well as its customs and religious practices. Such information seems fairly clearly intended to fill the gaps in knowledge of metropolitan readers. It could be seen as damaging or at least superfluous to the bridge-building aim, by tacitly conveying the superiority of the *métropole* and the greater importance of the metropolitan reader. But by giving a context and history to the Haitian other, the text does work to overcome prejudice, offering (metropolitan and non-metropolitan) French children an opportunity to better understand an island long sutured from, but still intimately related to, France. Various testimonies suggest that it has been successful in its attempts to raise consciousness, draw attention to, and increase understanding of, Haitian immigration.<sup>12</sup>

However, in addition to French children, the text has also been read by Haitians themselves, both on the island and elsewhere. The effect of the text on such readers, particularly those living outside Haiti, where Haitians are often looked down on, must also be considered. It seems that for some, its effect has been wholly positive. Discussing with Françoise Pfaff her experiences in Guadeloupe, Condé recalls:

When I talked about this book to schoolchildren, the Haitian kids were very happy to find a story located in their country. This made me realize that *Haiti chérie* had touched a sensitive spot.

FP Were these children regaining their Haitian heritage?

MC They were happy. (Pfaff 80)

The presence of Haiti in a respectable school book could be seen as valorising the country and the Haitians themselves – it is welcomed in the same way as the Congolese welcome Tintin. For such children, the text could have therapeutic effects along the lines of those indicated by Hugh Crago. *Rêves amers* could furnish readers with a means to address their problems, a language with which to discuss their experiences. But Crago also refers to the fact that when a reader encounters

painful stories which are too similar to their own, they may well reject them, casting aside the book in question (Crago 831–32). Nor is such short-circuiting the worst possible scenario, as is evident from Condé's candid comments in the same interview with Pfaff:

Some were also very intimidated and would hate to see me come to their class because they knew we were going to talk about Haiti and draw attention to them. Children are very complex, and they don't want to be noticed as different. This story would usually hurt a few of them. You had to be clever to get them to talk.

FP You describe Haiti as a very poor country, and I can easily understand why some children would hesitate to admit a connection to it.

MC This would again stress their status as marginalized, immigrant children who came from a problem-ridden country. Often the teacher would tell me that there were Haitian children in the class, but they didn't want to be identified as such. However, some of them would finally raise their hands and want to talk after a period of discussion. (Pfaff 80)

Aside from the fact that they are coerced into confronting their situation, Condé does not expand upon what exactly it is about the text that may have 'hurt' these readers. Various reasons might be adduced. Haitians are, for example, presented either as villains or victims in this text. The heroine fails to overcome the difficulties she is faced with, and, since she is clearly blameless, becomes an object of pity. It is not at all clear that Haitian children would welcome pity any more than they would hostility. Furthermore, the ending of the text in which the heroine drowns could potentially exacerbate the shame and embarrassment already suffered by Haitian children. They (or their parents) have survived this journey which the heroine and many others have failed, and this fact could arouse as much guilt as relief or pride. Condé was clearly well-intentioned in writing this text—seeking to speak for the voiceless, commemorate the dead, and correct misconceptions. The intentions and agenda could not be more different from those of Hergé's text which served as our point of departure. But, like *Tintin in the Congo*, Condé's text has also proved able to upset and unsettle at least some of its readers, including those whose interests it seeks to serve.

## CONCLUSION

A brief return to our point of departure will help conclude this discussion. David Enright, it will be remembered, objected to Hergé's portrayal of the Congolese as 'retarded children'. The yoking together of child and colonial subject is a recurrent trope in a wide range of discourses (see, for example, comments by Gandhi 32 or Briggs 169). Such tropes frequently serve as a means of exerting control over members of these groups, but, as *Vendredi ou la vie sauvage* demonstrates, less insidious alignments are also possible. Similarities in the experiences and situations of children and colonised peoples can be recognised without seeking to subjugate either group. Both are subject(ed) to power and

control, although in each case possibilities of resistance also exist. Similarly, for both groups, domination does not preclude desire and emulation.

If child and colonial subject can be aligned, so too is it possible to see a range of similarities in the concerns, status and development of postcolonial theory and criticism on the one hand, and children's literature criticism on the other. Both spheres of scholarly activity are concerned with once marginalised forms and subjects. Yet the two disciplines have evolved quite differently and each domain has developed strengths—but also blindspots—from which the other can clearly benefit and learn. On the one hand, postcolonial studies have been dominated by interest in writers, writing and production and would benefit from the expertise concerning readers, reception, and processes of resistance which have developed in the field of children's literature as well as in cultural studies by critics such as Janice A. Radway and John Fiske.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, children's literature studies have not yet fully shaken off a bias towards Western works and Western readers. Anne Pellowski has noted the dearth of comparative studies of children's literature and states that the descriptions of other national literatures which are available 'tend to be modeled on European or North American views of children's literature' (Pellowski 869). Even though none of the three texts considered here was initially produced for a non-European audience, they have each acquired such a readership. Detailed studies concerning the reception, circulation and transmission of these and other European texts in colonial and postcolonial settings are urgently needed. This article, like Herbert Kohl's examination of the Babar books, attempts to move some way towards this. In *Should We Burn Babar?*, Kohl is wary of facile universals, wondering whether 'children in South Africa or any of the former French colonies in Africa will find *Babar* amusing?', and describes the shocked response of a black South African friend who outlines the ways in which the children of his country would feel about the text (Kohl 31, 32–3). In other words Kohl here relies on an adult's view just as in the present article I have drawn extensively on the statements of interested adult parties, most notably the authors themselves. What is lacking, then, are the reactions of the children who have read these books in different parts of the world. Such responses will inevitably be incomplete and open to challenge: only ever based on samples and inherently affected by the unequal balance between (adult) interviewer and (child) interviewee. Yet however imperfect, they would surely help us move away from a simplistic, monolithic vision of children's literature and an essentialist, homogenised view of the child reader, contributing enormously to our understanding of the impact of different kinds of reading on different children in different circumstances across the world.

## NOTES

Unless otherwise stated, all translations from French are my own. For readers' convenience, the originals of longer quotations are given in the Notes.

1. Moulinsart, the company that controls the rights to Hergé's estate and the image of Tintin, refused permission to reproduce images from the text in this article. In an effort to suppress controversy, the beneficiaries 'souhaitent éviter que l'on reproduise des visuels de

- l'œuvre d'Hergé dans le cadre d'un sujet relatif au colonialisme ou à la politique' (wish to avoid the reproduction of visuals from Hergé's works in any context related to colonialism or politics). They do not wish to 'mettre de l'huile sur le feu' (add fuel to the flames) in England where *Congo* has already triggered 'trop de polémiques' (too many controversies). (Email correspondence with Delphine Maubert, iconographics department, 4 April 2008).
2. 'Les indigènes ne se différencient pas les uns des autres, ils ont le même faciès stéréotypé, le même caractère, et ne possèdent généralement pas de nom qui permette de les distinguer' (Apostolidès, *Les Métamorphoses de Tintin* [*The Metamorphoses of Tintin*] 22).
  3. 'C'est de l'hyperpolitiquement correct, qui frise le ridicule. Pour lutter contre le racisme, nous préférons lutter contre les discriminations à l'emploi ou au logement' (Bouilhet, 'La BD *Tintin au Congo* taxée de racisme' [*Tintin in the Congo* charged with racism] n.p.).
  4. See, for example, comments by contributors Patrick White, JKM and Chris to the discussion list following Beckford, 'Ban "racist" Tintin book, says CRE'.
  5. For an overview of such debates, see Penny Brown (Vol. 2, 264).
  6. The following titles are indicative of this trend: Gillian Klein, *Reading into Racism: Bias in Children's Literature and Reading Materials* (1985); Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, *Racist and Sexist Images in Children's Books* (1975); Richard Alexander, *Sexism in Children's Books* (1974).
  7. For a classic description of this situation see Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* [*Black Skin, White Masks*] (1975).
  8. 'Si certaines images caricaturales du peuple congolais données par *Tintin au Congo* font sourire les Blancs, elles font rire franchement les Congolais, parce que les Congolais y trouvent matière à se moquer de l'homme blanc 'qui les voyait comme cela!' (Assouline, *Hergé: Biographie* [*Hergé: A Biography*] 349). On the complexities of postcolonial humour see Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein, eds., *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial* (2005).
  9. 'Je reviens d'un voyage au Sénégal où j'ai [rencontré des écoliers], et à ma grande stupeur, en dépit de l'affinité de la couleur, de la peau, je les ai vu rejeter Vendredi et s'identifier à Robinson' (Tournier, 'Michel Tournier et l'enfance' [*Michel Tournier and childhood*] 4).
  10. 'Je leur ai demandé pourquoi. Ils m'ont donné des raisons: parce qu'il a une barbe (la barbe est prestigieuse dans ces pays-là, ex: les missionnaires français) parce qu'il a un fusil, parce que c'est un constructeur, un cultivateur. La plupart de ces enfants sont des fils de cultivateur. De plus, Robinson a un serviteur, comble de prestige. Alors que Vendredi n'est rien. Dans une classe de filles, j'ai demandé: "Qui voudriez-vous épouser?" Toutes ont choisi Robinson. L'une m'a dit: "Parce que Vendredi serait incapable de nourrir une femme et des enfants"' (Tournier, 'Michel Tournier et l'enfance' 4).
  11. 'En fait, quand j'ai écrit *Rêves amers*, c'était pour répondre à la demande d'un groupe d'enfants. Je les rencontrais régulièrement à Paris dans un atelier de lecture que j'animais. Ils me posaient nombre de questions sur les boat-people d'Haïti, qu'ils voyaient aux actualités télévisées. "Tu crois que parmi ces gens sur le bateau, il y a des enfants?" m'avait demandé une petite fille.' (Gens de la Caraïbe, 'Maryse Condé, spectatrice de Haïti Chérie' [*Maryse Condé watches Haïti Chérie*] n.p.).
  12. The text was, for example, studied by a class of nine year-olds at the Ecole des Peupliers [Poplar School] near Lille in 2003. The class teacher then posted the responses of several pupils onto the school website including the following:  

J'ai bien aimé car ce livre nous fait connaître le monde [...] On se dit que dans d'autres pays, les gens n'ont vraiment pas beaucoup de chance, surtout en Haïti' ('I liked it a lot because this book teaches us about the world [...] You tell yourself that in other countries people are really unfortunate, especially in Haiti'); 'C'est une histoire vraie et on voit ce qu'il se passe dans les pays pauvres' ('It's a true story and you see what happens in poor countries'). (Quoted in Chareyron n.p.)
  13. See, for example, John Fiske, *Television Culture* (1987); Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Culture* (1991).

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## The Selection of Children's Books Translated from Spanish to Galician, Basque and Catalan (1940–80)

MÓNICA DOMÍNGUEZ PÉREZ

*This study deals with children's literature translated from Castilian Spanish into Galician, Basque and Catalan by a different publisher from that of the source text, between 1940 and 1980, and with the criteria used to choose books for translation during that period. It compares the different literatures within Spain and examines the intersystemic and intercultural relations that the translations reflect. Following the polysystems theory, literature is here conceived as a network of agents of different kinds: authors, publishers, readers, and literary models. Such a network, called a polysystem, is part of a larger social, economic, and cultural network. These extra-literary considerations play an important role in determining the selection of works to be translated. The article suggests that translations can be said to establish transcultural relations, and that they demonstrate different levels of power within a specific interliterary community. It concludes that, while translations may aim to change the pre-existent relationships, frequently they just reflect the status quo.*

**Key words:** translation, Spanish children's literature, polysystems theory, interliterary community

This study deals with children's literature translated from Castilian Spanish<sup>1</sup> into Galician, Basque and Catalan by a different publisher from that of the source text, between 1940 and 1980, and with the criteria used to choose books for translation during that period. It compares the different literatures within Spain and examines the intersystemic and intercultural relations that the translations reflect.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Following the polysystems theory, literature is here conceived as a network of agents of different kinds: authors, publishers, readers, and literary models. Such a network, called a polysystem, is part of a larger social, economic, and cultural network (see Even-Zohar, 'Polysystem Studies'). These extra-literary